United Nations A/68/PV.75

General Assembly
Sixty-eighth session

Official Records

75th plenary meeting
Friday, 7 March 2014, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ashe ..... (Antigua and Barbuda)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 138 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/68/716/Add.2, A/68/716/Add.3, A/68/716/Add.4 and A/68/716/Add.5)

The President: I should like, in keeping with established practice, to draw the attention of the General Assembly to documents A/68/716/Addenda 2 to 5, in which the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that, since the issuance of his communication contained in document A/68/716/Add.1, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Timor-Leste, Mauritania and the Sudan have made the payments necessary to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in these documents?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 7 (*continued*)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

Third report of the General Committee (A/68/250/Add.2)

The President: In the first paragraph of its third report (A/68/250/Add.2), the General Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly that an additional sub-item entitled "Election of members of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law", be included in the agenda of the current session under agenda item 115 entitled "Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections" under heading I, "Organizational, administrative and other matters".

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to include this sub-item in the agenda of the current session under agenda item 115 and heading I?

It was so decided.

The President: In paragraph 1 (b), the General Committee further recommended that the sub-item be considered directly in plenary meeting. May I take it that the General Assembly decides to consider this sub-item in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: I should like to inform members that this additional sub-item becomes sub-item (f) of agenda item 115 in the agenda of the current session.

In paragraph 2 (a) of the report, the General Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly that an additional item, entitled "Investigation into the conditions and circumstances resulting in the tragic death of Dag Hammarskjöld and of the members of the party accompanying him", be included in the agenda of the current session under heading I, "Organizational, administrative and other matters".

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May I take it that the General Assembly decides to include this item in the agenda of the current session under heading I?

It was so decided.

The President: In paragraph 2 (b), the General Committee further recommends that the item be considered directly in plenary meeting. May I take it that the General Assembly decides to consider this item in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: I should like to inform Members that this additional item becomes agenda item 175 in the agenda of the current session.

The General Assembly has thus concluded its consideration of the third report of the General Committee.

Agenda 115 (*continued*)

Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections

(d) Election of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme

Note by the Secretary-General (A/68/770)

The President: Members will recall that, by its decision 60/409 of 16 March 2006, the General Assembly, on the proposal of the Secretary-General, elected Mr. Achim Steiner to be Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme for a four-year term of office, beginning on 15 June 2006 and ending on 14 June 2010.

I should like also to recall to members that, by its decision 64/420 of 22 April 2010, the General Assembly, on the proposal of the Secretary-General, re-elected Mr. Achim Steiner as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme for an additional four-year term of office, beginning on 15 June 2010 and ending on 14 June 2014.

In accordance with section II, paragraph 2 of General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of the twenty-seventh session of 15 December 1972, the Secretary-General wishes to nominate Mr. Steiner for re-election as Executive Director of the Programme for a term of two years, beginning on 15 June 2014 and ending on 14 June 2016.

Accordingly, may I take it that the General Assembly wishes to re-elect Mr. Achim Steiner as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme for a two-year term of office, beginning on 15 June 2014 and ending on 14 June 2016?

It was so decided.

The President: On behalf of the Assembly, I would like to congratulate Mr. Steiner on his re-election as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-item (d) of agenda item 115?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 7 (*continued*)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

The President: The Assembly has before it a report of the Fifth Committee on sub-item (a) of agenda item 116, entitled "Appointment of members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions", contained in document A/68/557/Add.1.

In order for the Assembly to consider the report of the Fifth Committee under the sub-item, it will be necessary to reopen consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 116. May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to reopen consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 116 and proceed immediately to its consideration?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 116 (*continued*)

Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments

(a) Appointment of members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/68/557/Add.1)

The President: In paragraph 3 of the report contained in document A/68/557/Add.1, the Fifth Committee recommends that the General Assembly appoint Mr. Ye Xuenong (China) as a member of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary

Questions for a term of office beginning on 7 March 2014 and ending on 31 December 2016.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to appoint Mr. Ye Xuenong (China) as a member of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for a term of office beginning on 7 March 2014 and ending on 31 December 2016?

It was so decided.

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 116?

It was so decided.

(g) Appointment of members of the Committee on Conferences

Note of the Secretary-General (A/68/91)

The President: Members will recall that at its 60th plenary meeting on 5 December 2013, the Assembly took note of the appointments of Denmark, Japan, Mauritania, Qatar, the United Republic of Tanzania and the United States of America as members of the Committee on Conferences for a period of three years, beginning on 1 January 2014. Members will also recall that at its 74th plenary meeting on 10 February 2014, the Assembly took note of the appointment of Jamaica as a member of the Committee on Conferences for a term of office beginning on the date of appointment and ending on 31 December 2016.

Members will further recall that there remained two vacant seats from the Latin American and Caribbean States, one seat for a term of office beginning on the date of appointment and ending on 31 December 2014, and one seat for a term of office beginning on the date of appointment and ending on 31 December 2015. On the recommendation of the Chair of the Latin American and Caribbean States, I have appointed Uruguay as a member of the Committee on Conferences for a term of office beginning on 7 March 2014 and ending on 31 December 2015. May I take it that the Assembly takes note of this appointment?

It was so decided.

The President: Regarding the remaining vacant seat from the Latin American and Caribbean States, I urge the Group to submit their candidature as soon as possible.

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (g) of agenda item 116.

The meeting rose at 3.20 p.m.

United Nations A/68/PV.76

General Assembly
Sixty-eighth session

Official Records

76th plenary meeting
Friday, 21 March 2014, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ashe ..... (Antigua and Barbuda)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Beck (Solomon Islands), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 7 (*continued*)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

The Acting President: I draw the attention of the General Assembly to resolution 68/151 of 18 December 2013, calling for a special meeting in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Members will recall that, at its 70th plenary meeting on 18 December 2013, the General Assembly concluded its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 67. It will be necessary to reopen its consideration in order to hold this special meeting.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to reopen consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 67?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: Members will further recall that at its 2nd plenary meeting on 20 September 2013, the General Assembly decided to allocate sub-item (a) of agenda item 67 to the Third Committee.

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to consider sub-item (a) of agenda item 67 directly in plenary meeting and proceed immediately to its consideration?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 67 (*continued*)

Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

(a) Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

Commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

The Acting President: I am pleased to be here today on behalf of the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session, John W. Ashe, who regrets that he is unable to take part in this commemorative meeting. The President is well aware that the scourge and pain of racism are still widely prevalent around the world and that the many ignorant manifestations of racism take a heavy toll on our world and its progress.

As we observe the 2014 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, we call to mind those whom we honour today: the 69 people who died at the Sharpeville massacre — men, women and children who lost their lives in the quest for equality and dignity; those whose deaths galvanized the world to act to end apartheid. Fitting to the theme of this year's commemoration of the role of leaders in combatting racism and racial discrimination, we also call to mind the great spirit of Nelson Mandela, who left us in December. His unending determination to bring equality to his people is a legacy we are all called

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to carry forward. Today we feel the pain of those who continue to suffer racism and racial discrimination throughout the world. Today is a reminder that the elimination of racial discrimination is possible, and indeed some might say it is inevitable.

In December 2013, we celebrated the sixty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of one of the most important landmark human rights instruments of our times: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The anniversary was marked by ceremony, but at the same time we must concede that humankind continues to struggle with the affirmation contained in article 1 of the Declaration that:

> "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

That dichotomy of recognizing a truth in theory and actually living it in practice is very much present in our world today. On the one hand, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has inspired a growing body of human rights instruments, which are mechanisms to monitor and reinforce its implementation, which in turn is strengthened by national protection systems. Yet, on the other hand, racism still affects our societies, and human rights are still routinely violated.

As many people still face discrimination on those grounds, even as we hold today's commemoration, we know that poor, vulnerable, marginalized populations and minorities are continually discriminated against based on their race, colour or national origin. Too many suffer from persecution and are denied equal access to the law and recognition before the law. Such violations occur far too often.

One positive step would be to fully implement and operationalize the instruments we already have in place. In the nearly five decades since the General Assembly proclaimed the first International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination of 26 October 1966 and despite the three Decades to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination previously declared by the United Nations, the programmes of action for the Decades have not been fully implemented, and their objectives remain unfulfilled. Each time, in spite of near-universal ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, too many individuals and communities continue to suffer from the stigma and systematic effects of racism. A lack of effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action has hindered efforts to effectively eradicate the scourge of racism worldwide.

Racism is a global problem and requires global action, and there are a number of important ways we can continue to work towards the elimination of racism worldwide. In that regard, we look forward to seeing the draft programme for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent which will be developed by the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. This important Decade will begin in 2015 and will create an opportunity to mobilize the world's energy to promote equality for the people of African descent and contribute to greater economic and social development, social justice and inclusion. We also hope to use the opportunity in four days of the commemoration of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and the abhorrent practice of slavery as a reminder that contemporary forms of racism remain all too pervasive in our societies.

We must redouble our efforts to ensure that, just as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights calls for all people to be free from servitude and slavery, today's debate on racial discrimination can also contribute to the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda. That agenda should emphasize eliminating discrimination in laws, policies and practices as well as combating all forms and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and eliminating violence and hate crimes against particular groups.

Paragraph 3 of Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations calls for respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. Guided by the United Nations Charter and paragraph 3 of its Article 1, the General Assembly adopted resolution 68/151, which has brought us together for today's special event. It shows Member States' continued commitment to the fight against racism. Let us remain steadfast in our efforts. Let us turn theory into practice. Let us honour those who have died and those who work for justice and equality. May the legacy of Madiba inspire all leaders and all peoples of the world to work tirelessly towards a world free of racism.

I now give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson.

The Deputy Secretary-General: At today's important meeting commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, I am honoured to share with the General Assembly a message from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

I applaud the Assembly for its focus on the state of racial discrimination worldwide. I would like to state from the very beginning that the Secretary-General and I consider ending racism to be a priority for the United Nations every single day of the year. I hope the Assembly will allow me to offer a few of my own thoughts on that important topic, but first I shall read out the message of the Secretary-General:

> "This year, the world commemorates the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination for the first time following the death of former South African President Nelson Mandela. This sad reality is also a reminder of his courageous struggle against apartheid and his inspiring victory over the racist forces that had imprisoned him for 27 years.
>
> "The General Assembly, in a show of solidarity with the anti-apartheid movement, established this Day to commemorate the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre, when 69 people were killed and many others injured as police opened fire on a peaceful protest against South Africa's appalling pass laws.
>
> "Nelson Mandela's journey from prisoner to President was the triumph of an extraordinary individual against the forces of hate, ignorance and fear — and it was a testimony to the power of courage, reconciliation and forgiveness to overcome the injustice of racial discrimination. He chose Sharpeville for the historic signing of South Africa's new Constitution in 1996. On that occasion, President Mandela said,
>
> > 'Out of the many Sharpevilles which haunt our history was born the unshakeable determination that respect for human life, liberty and well-being must be enshrined as rights beyond the power of any force to diminish.'
>
> "Today, we remember Sharpeville as a symbol of the terrible toll of racial discrimination, and we honour those who lost their lives during the massacre. At the same time, we recall that President Mandela framed Sharpeville's legacy as an unwavering resolve to protect the dignity and rights of all people. The lessons of South Africa's staunch defence of equality 'out of the many Sharpevilles' in the country's history can be applied anywhere in the world, not only in response to organized, institutional forms of racism but wherever the pernicious problem occurs, including in daily interpersonal relations.
>
> "I call on all people, especially political, civic and religious leaders, to strongly condemn messages and ideas based on racism, racial superiority or hatred as well as those that incite racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. On this Day, let us acknowledge that racial discrimination remains a dangerous threat and resolve to tackle it through dialogue inspired by the proven ability of individuals to respect, protect and defend our rich diversity as one human family."

That concludes the Secretary-General's message.

Since the Sharpeville massacre, the United Nations has made strong efforts to prevent and combat racism and racial discrimination. We honour those who have fought discrimination and we commemorate the victims of appalling historical injustices. On that point, I want to commend the work of the Permanent Memorial Committee established to carry out the initiative to erect a permanent memorial to the victims of the transatlantic slave trade at United Nations Headquarters. I urge full support for the realization of the meaningful vision of "Forever free". We must always remember the terrible price that is exacted when we discount everyone's equal value.

Still today, the violation of fundamental human rights continues to undermine the dignity, the well-being and the physical safety of far too many people in our world. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance are on the rise in many communities across the world. We see frequent violent attacks, incitements to hatred and hate speech against people of different ethnicities and perceived races. It is a collective responsibility — but primarily that of States — to address racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance before those problems explode into open conflict. We must see those warning signs. We must see those vibrations in the ground when we start

to divide humanity into "us" and "them". That is when the dangers start.

We must act at that stage. That was the whole idea behind the recent "Rights up front" initiative that the Secretary-General asked me to present to the Member States for all of us to work on. All parts of the United Nations system must join forces for the greatest possible impact. I am gratified that the United Nations network on racial discrimination and protection of minorities brings together over 20 United Nations entities in a crucial common cause.

The decision of the General Assembly to announce the International Decade for People of African Descent is testimony to our collective resolve to unite against racial discrimination. Next month, the work will begin on drafting the programme for the Decade, which is set to start in 2015. The decade offers a very special opportunity for the world to come together and promote equality for people of African descent, and thereby to contribute to development, social justice and inclusion. Of course, that has wider ramifications, sending the message of every human being's equal value.

In closing, let me say that we are fortunate to have the opportunity to hear today from Ms. Gay McDougall, who has dedicated her career to ending discrimination. Over the years, she has provided a great deal of wise professional advice to the United Nations. We are deeply grateful for her invaluable work, which I have personally followed over the years in different capacities. At one meeting here, she said,

> "Within the chambers of the United Nations, the tragedy of racism is often described in broad and at times impersonal terms, but the reality can be found in countless personal tragedies and struggles faced every day by individuals, families and communities in every country."

As we discuss international efforts to address racial discrimination, we must never forget that ultimately it is a scourge that strikes at the dignity and rights of individuals and that it tears at the fabric of our societies and even the fabric of international cooperation. Fighting racial discrimination is thus a collective as well as a personal responsibility for all of us. Let us resolve to speak out against racial discrimination in all forms, large and small. Let us denounce all slurs, all discriminatory practices and all attacks in our loudest voices. And let us together build a world of true equality.

The Acting President: I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for delivering the message of the Secretary-General and for his statement.

In accordance with resolution 68/151 of 18 December 2013, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was invited to speak at this commemorative meeting. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is unable to be here with the Assembly today due to her participation at a similar meeting in the framework of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. Her message will be made available on the website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

I should now like to consult members with a view to inviting Ms. Gay McDougall, first United Nations Independent Expert on minority issues, former expert member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and former Special Rapporteur to the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, to make a statement at this meeting in accordance with resolution 68/151 of 18 December 2013.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Ms. McDougall to make a statement at this meeting?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision just taken, I now give the floor to Ms. Gay McDougall, first United Nations Independent Expert on minority issues, former expert member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and former Special Rapporteur to the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

Ms. McDougall: As was expressed so eloquently in the statement delivered on behalf of the Secretary-General, on this day in 1960 police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid pass laws in Sharpeville, South Africa. This day originally commemorated the lives lost in the fight for democracy and equal human rights in South Africa during the apartheid regime. Since the defeat of apartheid, this day has been an occasion to remind the international community of its solemn duty to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

Over the decades since the Sharpeville massacre, 176 countries have ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, with 87 signatories. Its treaty monitoring body, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, has counseled and sometimes prodded countries, one by one, to implement their obligations under the Treaty and to make the promise of the Convention real in the lives of all people. I was privileged to serve on that Committee for four years.

In 2001, the third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, made a critical contribution. There, Governments acknowledged that racial discrimination existed in every country and in every region, and that the fight against racism was an international priority for all nations. The past abuses of the transatlantic slave trade and the system of colonialism were addressed in what was an historic discourse. Equally important, the Conference developed a picture of what racial discrimination looks like in the twenty-first century.

The problem of racial discrimination was defined as not solely one of bias, in the sense of personal prejudice, but rather as one of social and economic exclusion, placing the emphasis more fundamentally on economic and social rights. Racial discrimination was placed squarely in the context of globalization and the economic disparities that exist along racial lines both within and between countries. Economic exclusion was seen as a cause and a consequence of entrenched discrimination against certain racial and ethnic minorities in both developed and developing countries.

For many civil society and affected groups, the Durban Conference was a hugely empowering experience. New networks were born and new momentum was created, which was then carried back to communities. Connections were made between the situation of African descendants in the diaspora, Roma, Dalits, migrants and indigenous peoples. Out of those exchanges and the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination have come a number of key understandings and necessary approaches.

We understand that global challenges, such as the worldwide financial crisis, global food shortages and climate change, have exacerbated problems faced by racialized communities. Austerity policies and budget cuts hit those at the bottom of the economic strata with greater impact. People in poverty lack reserves to ride out tough times or natural disasters. Also, times of economic crisis increase social pressures to blame those who have the least power. Those tendencies can lead to hate speech and violence against disadvantaged communities and can also threaten democracies by giving rise to racist policies or even racist political parties.

Discrimination is now more broadly recognized as a key determinant for poverty. Marginalized racial groups are disproportionately concentrated in low-skilled, low-wage, informal sectors such as domestic work, agricultural labour and street vending — sectors that are generally unprotected by labour laws and social security. Now we see more clearly the complex burdens borne by women — burdens of poverty, ethnic prejudice and gender-based restrictions, all overlapping in ways that form profound obstacles.

In addition to the disempowering personal impact that racial prejudice has on its victims, it is critically important to understand its structural nature. In societies where racial prejudice has been endemic over many eras, it becomes self-perpetuating in the institutions that determine social advancement and economic survival. This key understanding about the structural nature of racial inequality must be central to fashioning remedies. Of course, it is essential to have comprehensive antidiscrimination legislation and strong enforcement institutions with procedures that can be initiated by the victims themselves or their representatives.

Additionally, there should be a comprehensive approach that recognizes the importance of tackling legal regimes, policies and practices that have a negative disparate impact on communities disadvantaged by racial discrimination, regardless of intent. Governments should undertake robust special measures to address disparities in the participation of racial groups in economic life. Aggressive programmes should be developed, especially in the fields of employment, education and training, financial services, land tenure and property rights. Labour protection and social security policies should be extended to low-wage and informal sector workers.

Affirmative action measures should be undertaken within a broader comprehensive equality strategy, which should cover a spectrum of legislative initiatives with targeted budgetary supports, including benchmarks and quotas. Decisions on policy choices should be

made in meaningful consultation with disadvantaged groups. They should be transparent and supported by disaggregated data that reveals the existing inequalities.

Now more than ever, the banners in demonstrations for racial justice in countries around the world call for the right to work, the right to housing, an equal right to quality education and the right to a living wage. This is the case in countries with economies still developing as well as in countries with highly developed economies.

Finally, it is encouraging that there is a growing consensus within global development institutions about the importance of addressing the current extremes in both income inequality and poverty levels. One experience that gives rise to this lesson is that efforts in some countries to meet the Millennium Development Goals have failed to change the realities of many groups who are victims of endemic discrimination.

As the international community looks to the future, it is a hopeful sign for the racial justice and economic rights movement that one of the core principles for the post-2015 sustainable development agenda is to leave no-one behind. But we must all work extremely hard to make these words into reality.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guinea-Bissau, who will speak on behalf of Group of African States.

Mr. Da Gama (Guinea-Bissau) (*spoke in French*): I welcome the presence among us of the Deputy Secretary-General and thank him for his statement on behalf of the Secretary-General and himself.

We align ourselves with the statement to be made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

(*spoke in English*)

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the African States in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the theme "The role of leaders in combating racism and racial discrimination". The symbolism of this theme is not lost on us, as the legacy of one of Africa's iconic leaders, the late Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, has been a driving force in the elimination of racial discrimination in his own country, South Africa. The African Group welcomes this annual event as an opportunity not only to join collective efforts in raising awareness about the pernicious impact of racism but also, more important, to assess progress in our common struggle to combat racism and racial discrimination through the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

In taking stock today, some people may argue, perhaps justifiably, that we still have a long way to go in combating that scourge; but we would all agree that, without strong and sustained leadership, all the best blueprints, legal instruments and institutions will remain blunt tools.

It should be recalled that the aim of this commemoration is, inter alia, to mobilize political will at the national, regional and international levels and to reaffirm our political commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the outcome document of the Durban Review Conference, as well as their follow-up processes at all those levels.

Allow me to conclude by reaffirming the African Group's commitment to continuing to contribute to global efforts towards the total elimination of racism and racial discrimination.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tonga, who will speak on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group of States.

Mr. Tupouniua (Tonga): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 55 States members of the Asia-Pacific Group as Chair for the month of March.

At the outset, we would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this special meeting to commemorate and observe this important day, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. We would also like to thank Ms. Gay McDougall for the statement that she has just delivered. Ms. McDougall's deep knowledge and experience in the field of racial discrimination speaks volumes for the invitation to her to be with us today to commemorate this important occasion.

It is clear to us that the core international human rights instruments place obligations on States to positively work towards eradicating discrimination in the public and private spheres. Related to that, the principle of equality also obliges States to adopt specific measures that serve to eliminate the conditions that sustain or contribute to the prevalence of racial discrimination. That premise is one of the foundations of this International Day. Together we have agreed that we must fight against such prejudice with the greatest

determination and perseverance, as it continues to tarnish our humanity. The struggle against racial discrimination is a fight for human rights and dignity.

The fact that we have gathered here today in this Hall speaks to the truism that our leaders have stayed true to the collective will to triumph in the struggle and fight to eliminate racial discrimination. Our commemoration and observance of this Day today must serve as a reminder of the need to sustain and persevere in that commitment and to further invigorate our collective efforts in the pursuit of the elimination of racial discrimination. That is especially true as we encounter new and varied challenges in this day and age. Such challenges must, however, be seen as secondary to our common goal and aspiration of freeing the world and its victims, both silent and heard, of the scourge of racial discrimination.

The eyes of the world, in particular those of victims, are upon us again today. We therefore celebrate this Day not only to mark our successes in our common approach towards eliminating racial discrimination from among us but also to reaffirm our concern. The occasion also serves to ensure that we are aware that much work remains to be done. The new challenges manifest themselves in the many forms of racial discrimination. Traditional manifestations have taken the form of war, conquest, slavery, the oppression of indigenous peoples, genocide, ethnic cleansing and other atrocities. However, there are more subtle expressions of racial discrimination that manifest themselves through realities such as discriminatory laws and social practices that affect the lives and livelihoods of entire communities throughout the world. Such practices have resulted in continuing poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization and socioeconomic exclusion. There is therefore a need and a call for a new unity in our common approach. Racial discrimination cannot simply be wished away, but must be seriously addressed with the accompanying political will and action.

The theme of this year's commemoration and observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is "The role of leaders in combatting racism and racial discrimination". The theme is apt, appropriate and timely. State action, mobilization and social change cannot be genuinely carried forward in that regard without the positive decisions and actions of our leaders. Our leaders provide the political will and means to ensure that the struggle and fight to combat racism and eliminate racial discrimination are achieved. Our leaders have the responsibility to ensure adherence to, and the full and effective implementation of, the relevant international human rights instruments so as to address the scourges of racism and racial discrimination. Laws and social practices that are racially discriminatory should be phased out or abolished. It is up to our leaders to mobilize our collective will at the national, regional and international levels, together with the requisite support of all stakeholders in the private sector and civil society organizations, in order to make the fight against racism and the elimination of racial discrimination a success.

Finally, on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group, allow me again to declare and reiterate our strong commitment and unwavering determination to ensure that the role of our leaders, for the sake of all victims, is to make sure that the struggle and fight for the elimination of racial discrimination remain a high priority in our respective countries and throughout the world.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bulgaria, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Tafrov (Bulgaria): I would first of all like to thank all previous speakers for their moving words about Nelson Mandela. He is a shining example of human dignity for millions of people across the world and, if I may say, my personal hero.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States. We welcome this year's theme of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, namely, "The role of leaders in combatting racism and racial discrimination", as we believe that leaders can and must play a key role in mobilizing the political will to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Leaders have the authority and capacity to promote greater respect and trust among the various groups within society. With their vision and insight, they can help to tackle hatred and extremism by building unity in the face of such threats.

The Eastern European States have repeatedly demonstrated their commitment to fighting against racism and racial discrimination, which remains a priority of our human rights agenda. We are deeply concerned that the objective to eradicate racism has not yet been attained. Despite the many efforts,

much remains to be done at the national, regional and international levels.

We would like to reaffirm that the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination is, and should remain, the basis for all efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate racism. We reiterate the fundamental importance of ratifying and fully implementing the Convention, which should be a priority for all countries. While we recognize the important role of the international community that that end, we would like to underline that the fight against racism is the primary responsibility of the State and that each country should take effective measures at the national level.

In his latest report in follow-up to resolution 67/155 (A/68/564), the Secretary-General highlights that some progress has been made in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, but still no country can claim to be free of challenges, posed by those phenomena. As pointed out in the latest report (A/68/329) by Mr. Mutuma Ruteere, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, no country is immune. Our countries are no exception: we face our own challenges with regard to discrimination, hatred and violence on the basis of perceived racial, ethnic, religious and other differences.

At the same time, we have adopted a number of policy and legislative measures to fight against racism and racial discrimination and other ways to penalize and ban incitement to racism, xenophobic violence or hatred. We are particularly concerned, however, that a great number of hate crimes remain unreported. As such, they are not prosecuted and the perpetrators are not punished.

The Eastern European States are also supportive of the work of civil society organizations in this area, including their activities aimed at raising public awareness on the importance of fighting against racism and xenophobia.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the global fight against racism and racial discrimination is an issue of concern for all countries. The international community must be united in the fight against this scourge. We hold the view that the global effort for the total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance can succeed only if we work together to achieve that common objective.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Chile, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Gálvez (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC).

The GRULAC countries reiterate their support for the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. We emphasize the urgent need for its effective implementation as a solid foundation for the total elimination of racism and racial discrimination, scourges from which, unfortunately, not a single society can consider itself definitely exempt.

Consequently, our countries acknowledge the importance of the Durban follow-up mechanisms for the full implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action. In that regard, we agree on the need and importance of addressing new forms of discrimination. We therefore support the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of Complementary Standards to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Our countries want to highlight the pertinent focus of the Secretary-General's recent report (A/68/564) related to xenophobia, national mechanisms against all forms of racism and on procedural gaps in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination — crucial issues in the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

The countries of our region are made up of multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual societies. We have a large and growing population of people of African descent, which has been estimated at more than 150 million people. Despite the progress achieved in promoting the rights of people of African descent, there are still many important challenges that hinder their full inclusion under equal conditions and opportunities. In that vein, we are proud to announce that at the end of the year 2013, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States proclaimed the International Decade for Latin American and Caribbean People of African Descent as of 1 January 2014. Its aim is to strengthen regional and international cooperation to guarantee the human rights of people of African descent, including in the areas of education, health, identity, dignity, cultural values and economic and social development.

Likewise, GRULAC States members have welcomed the General Assembly's proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent, to begin on 1 January 2015 under the theme "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development". We call on all Member States to work constructively for the preparation of a comprehensive and effective programme of work. We believe that the decade will provide an opportunity to promote the concrete implementation of the main provisions set out in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action as well as of the International Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in order to achieve the full and effective inclusion of all people of African descent.

Along the same lines, we would like to highlight that a recent regional meeting of Latin American and Caribbean States on the International Decade for People of African Descent was held in Brasilia this year with the participation of representatives of Government, experts, civil society, social movements and international organizations, aimed at promoting cooperation among the countries of our region in order to coordinate a common agenda on those relevant issues.

Those efforts by GRULAC Member States reaffirm our determination to promote the full inclusion of people of African descent in our societies, to commit to the wider goal of overcoming racism and discrimination and, in so doing, to effectively advance towards the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. McLay (New Zealand): It is good to see a Pacific face, Sir, in the Chair in the course of this very important debate.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States in commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, a day when we join with all regional groups and others in expressing our solidarity in the fight to end racial discrimination.

Racial discrimination strikes at the very heart of the concept that should unite us all, that is, that all men and women are born free and equal in dignity and in rights. Over the years, we have seen inspirational leadership on the issue, apartheid — against which those brave unarmed and peaceful demonstrators in the township of Sharpeville protested 54 years ago this very day, which the Vice-President referred to in his comments on behalf of the President of the General Assembly's — has been defeated.

As the President has also emphasized, we would be remiss if we did not mention the role of Nelson Mandela, who courageously led the campaign against apartheid and institutionalized racism in South Africa and whose memory is a constant reminder that leaders, whether they be political or community leaders, have an important role in combating racism and racial discrimination. They perform vital roles in shaping social attitudes.

Leadership has been crucial when developing both international and national frameworks aimed at the elimination of racism. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination provides us with an international framework to combat racism. Many States also have in place national protection systems.

However, despite that progress, we are still a long way from eliminating this scourge. Racism, xenophobia and intolerance remain in all societies. We need principled and continuing leadership to ensure the effective implementation of the frameworks that we have and to continue to develop new practical tools to tackle the issue. We must find ways to talk to young generations to educate them to better understand, celebrate and enjoy the world's diversity.

In that regard, we welcome the United Nations "Let's fight racism!" social media campaign, launched in 2011. The initiative reminds us that the fight against racial discrimination is also very personal, because our own perceptions and our own prejudices can contribute to racial prejudice.

That is a sobering reminder. But it is also empowering, as it tells us that there is something we can all do, that each and every one of us can and must at a personal level play a role in breaking down racial prejudice and intolerant attitudes. The "Let's fight racism!" campaign provides a global mechanism to facilitate individual and civil society involvement.

We must join forces to end racism: all of us in this room. And we must do so at an international level, at a national level and at a personal level.

Mr. Ngculu (South Africa): I would like to thank the President for convening this special meeting of the General Assembly in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the African Group earlier today.

Let me also express my delegation's appreciation to Ms. Gay McDougall for her participation and efforts in advancing the anti-racism agenda. Indeed, it was the expectation of my delegation that there would be this level of participation by eminent persons active in this area.

Since 1994, 21 March has been commemorated in South Africa as a human rights day and it is a public holiday. The South African Government chose Sharpeville, in the Gauteng province, as the venue to launch South Africa's new Constitution, signed by its first democratically elected President, Mr. Nelson Mandela, on 8 May 1996. The Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the Government of South Africa states that,

> "Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken."

This day commemorates the lives that were lost in the fight for democracy and equal human rights in South Africa during the apartheid regime — a regime that embraced racial discrimination. As we know, Nelson Mandela represented the millions enslaved by the shackles of racism. We can no longer pretend that racial discrimination is a figment of the imagination, in a world where heightened racial consciousness confines millions to the margins of global society.

The stage was set for Mr. Mandela to emerge from prison and play his historic role. He did so with extraordinary grace, conviction, goodwill and success. All those developments helped to convince South Africans that the best option would be a common constitutional dispensation in which whites would inevitably lose their exclusive power, but in which the fundamental rights of all South Africans would be protected by a strong Constitution.

As Nelson Mandela taught us,

> "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his or her skin or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate, and, if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love. For love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

Our non-racial constitutional democracy is Mandela's greatest monument. The most enduring monument we can build to Mandela's memory is to stay true to his ideals, including his unwavering commitment to justice, equality and non-racialism.

Posterity will look at the current generation in the light of the Mandela experience. If we fail, it will not make sense to future generations that while Mandela evolved into a solid morale force that urged humankind higher on the plane of civilization, those who followed him either failed to live up to his philosophy or simply destroyed his dream.

In commemoration of this historic day, President Jacob Zuma earlier today said,

> "We have worked hard together to promote human rights that many paid for with their lives. But while we have a good story to tell, there is still a lot more to be done to improve the quality of lives of our people."

In memory of those who lost their lives because of the scourge of racism, let us build a better world together, using the lessons learned over the years.

Mr. Patriota (Brazil): Let me thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this special meeting. Let me also thank Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson for his statement and for reading out a statement on behalf of the Secretary-General. Let me also thank Ms. Gay McDougall for her very inspiring words.

I wish to begin by paying tribute to the memory of Nelson Mandela, who conducted one of the most important processes of emancipation of humankind in contemporary history — the end of apartheid in South Africa. Madiba's legacy of racial reconciliation and tolerance remains an inspiration. He taught us that no one is born hating others and that love and solidarity should and can be more enduring human traits. Through a message of forgiveness and forbearance, Mandela has not only built one of the major multi-racial and multi-ethnic democracies in the world, but also become one of the most influential voices of his age.

Although apartheid — the most heinous form of institutionalized racial discrimination in the recent past — was officially dismantled 20 years ago, racial discrimination remains. Over the past years, national and international laws have been implemented so as to forbid racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and overcome centuries of racial subjugation. A landmark in that regard was the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, the so-called Durban Conference and its review conferences. As a direct result of the Durban Conference, 11 years ago on 21 March, Brazil established a Ministry for the promotion of racial equality, geared towards implementing policies aimed at combating prejudice and discrimination and creating equal opportunity for all.

More than three centuries of slavery have seriously impinged upon the population of African descent in Brazil. The effects are still visible in our society. Brazil has the largest population of black persons outside of Africa. As of 2013, they accounted for over 100 million people, and that number is expected to rise to over 115 million by mid-century. Although they represent the majority of the Brazilian population, a great proportion still live in unfavourable conditions on the outskirts of large Brazilian cities, subsist on lower incomes, have access to a lower level of education and, according to statistics, their sons and daughters are three times more vulnerable to violence.

Over the past 10 years Brazil has recorded great success in redressing social and racial inequalities, having lifted over 36 million people out of extreme poverty through governmental assistance policies. Seventy-five per cent of the new middle class is of African descent. Whereas in 2002 only 38 per cent of the middle class was made up of Afro-Brazilians, in 2012 they accounted for more than 50 per cent of the Brazilian middle class population.

Notwithstanding the historic relevance of those achievements, we acknowledge that persistent racial inequality, manifestations of racism and racial discrimination related to past atrocities remain. That is true not only for Brazil, but also for many other countries.

The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 is our road map for the elaboration on the post-2015 sustainable development goals. It places fundamental emphasis on the eradication of poverty and the achievement of sustainable development in its three dimensions, namely, the economic, social and environmental.

As the wheels are set in motion for a development agenda for after 2015, the international community should aim at strengthening the view, on the one hand, that diversity is an asset and, on the other, that we are all bound together by a common humanity, regardless of race, colour, gender, identity, social origin, faith, disability or political opinion. Our enemies in that context are the old and new avatars of intolerance and all exceptionalist mind sets.

In that spirit, Brazil welcomes the proclamation by the General Assembly of the International Decade for People of African Descent, which is intended to raise awareness in combatting prejudice, intolerance and racism against the segment of the human race that has been systematically discriminated against and still deserves special attention and solidarity. But let us not forget that many other segments continue to suffer discrimination. Ms. McDougall mentioned the Roma, indigenous people and migrants. But I wish also to recall the abominable resonance of terms such as Islamophobia, anti-semitism and homophobia.

As we recall Mandela's unmatched achievements, let us also recall that the true champions of freedom of a universal appeal are often ones who do not conform to the status quo. Let us make this struggle our struggle. Let us search for Mandela's example inside each and every one of us, and also praise the anonymous heros of the everyday struggle against racial discrimination from the past and the present who have upheld their values and fought for a more just, more equal and more humane world.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in this commemorative meeting. I would like to thank all speakers for their statements marking the commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 67?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.

United Nations A/68/PV.77

General Assembly
Sixty-eighth session

Official Records

77th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 25 March 2014, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ashe ..... (Antigua and Barbuda)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 120 (*continued*)

Follow-up to the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade

Commemorative meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

The President: Members will recall that the General Assembly held the debate on agenda item 120 and adopted resolution 68/7, entitled "Permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade", at its 35th plenary meeting, on 21 October 2013. Permit me to make a statement.

Today, we commemorate the spirit, courage and legacy of the millions of men, women and children who were victims of one of the darkest and most abhorrent chapters in history — the transatlantic slave trade. As we gather for this year's International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, we call to mind the memory of all those who suffered the cruelty and injustice of the largest forced migration in history. A number of commemorative activities will be held in observance of this Day, and I encourage the support and participation of all Member States.

The theme of this year's celebration is "Victory over slavery: Haiti and beyond". This year, we acknowledge the role of a country synonymous with the quest for freedom against the institution of slavery. The Haitian revolution of 1791 to 1804 is considered by historians to be the most successful and sustained slave revolt to have ever occurred. Led by Toussaint Louverture, as well as others such as Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henri Christophe, the Haitian revolution was a defining moment in the histories of Europe and the Americas. It culminated in the birth of a new nation, the Republic of Haiti, which celebrated its two hundred and tenth anniversary in January.

This past September, we acknowledged the Republic of Haiti's struggle against slavery with the commission for the permanent memorial project, which was awarded to Mr. Rodney Leon, an American architect of Haitian descent. It was my pleasure to participate in that ceremony, which recognized the winning design, namely, Mr. Leon's "The Ark of Return", and to pay tribute to the skilled artists from 83 different countries who participated in the contest with the submission of 310 designs. The permanent memorial is not only a symbol of remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade but also a powerful tribute to the human fortitude and courage that led to the breaking of the shackles of slavery and the burdens of bigotry.

The Permanent Memorial Committee has reported that the design and construction phases of the project have commenced with a view to the unveiling of the memorial at the start of the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly. I recognize the generous contributions made so far by some Member States to the Permanent Memorial Fund. Regrettably, however, the

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Fund still lacks the amount required for the completion of that worthy project. Since it was the Assembly that decided that the memorial should be erected, I urge all Member States to do their utmost and to make additional contributions to that eminently worthy project so that it can be completed by the date decided upon.

Today, we once again gather to honour the universal and powerful human truths that, wherever peoples are oppressed and crippled by discrimination, there are and should be peoples who stand up to oppression and speak up against discrimination.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the UNESCO Slave Route Project, launched in Ouidah, Benin, in 1994. In many ways, that Project broke the silence on slavery and the slave trade by raising our collective awareness. Through the Project's intercultural dialogue and activities, research and publications, we know and understand more about the slave trade and its devastating consequences.

More significantly, the Project has contributed to the international community's acknowledgement that slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity, as determined at the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa. That important acknowledgement can be found in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

In that regard, I am delighted to have with us here today The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, who is a former Governor General of Canada, the current UNESCO Special Envoy for Haiti and a member of the International Scientific Committee of the UNESCO Slave Route Project (2014-2015). She will share her insights with us as the key presenter on this International Day of Remembrance. We will also be treated to a cultural performance by the renowned Haitian singer Ms. Emeline Michel.

UNESCO's work in this field is another reminder that we must continue to study the history and legacy of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. The resources and materials available at educational institutions worldwide provide us with an opportunity to explore the causes and consequences of slavery and to reflect upon the lessons learned. We can also use the outreach opportunities of this Day to draw attention to the many contributions that enslaved Africans made to nation-building through the application of their knowledge and skills.

While we reflect on the past, we must also acknowledge the cruelties that continue to exist today. Foremost among them, slavery still stalks our planet in many forms and manifestations. Too many innocent women and young girls are held in bondage and denied their freedom and right to live in dignity due to human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Too many children are held in servitude and are victims of child labour. Combating such abuses is a daunting challenge. We must turn our commitments into concrete action so that women and young people can live without fear and want.

Four days ago, we commemorated the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which speaks to another relevant and pervasive problem in our societies. The legacy of the transatlantic slave trade reminds us of the continued dangers of racism, injustice and prejudice and speaks to the work that we must still do in that regard.

Later this year, during the sixty-ninth session, we will launch the International Decade for People of African Descent, from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2024, under the theme "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development". Historical injustices have undeniably contributed to the inequality, economic disparities, marginalization and social exclusion faced by people of African descent in different parts of the world.

During last week's commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (see A/68/PV.76), we heard from many Member States who had undertaken initiatives at the national level to ensure the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by people of African descent in all spheres. Let us use the opportunity afforded by the Decade to continue our fight for a world free of racism and discrimination.

As a community of nations, it is our responsibility to address the root causes of modern-day slavery, to provide protection and assistance to the victims and to ensure that there is no impunity for the perpetrators of such practices. By our continued and sustained efforts to eradicate contemporary forms of slavery, as well as racism and racial discrimination, we move forward down the path of dignity, decency and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

I now give the floor to the Chef de Cabinet, Under-Secretary-General Susana Malcorra, to make a statement on behalf of the Secretary-General.

Ms. Malcorra: It is honour to represent the Secretary-General at this important event. The Secretary-General regrets that he is not able to attend and has asked me to deliver this message on his behalf.

> "Each year on this day we honour the memory of the millions of men, women and children who endured the curse of slavery. By recalling the causes, consequences and lessons of the transatlantic slave trade, we recommit to educating current and future generations on the dangers of racism and prejudice.
>
> "The theme of this year's observance is "Victory over slavery: Haiti and beyond". It pays tribute to the fight against slavery in nations around the world and marks 210 years since the Republic of Haiti became the first nation to win independence as a result of the struggle of enslaved men and women. As the President of the General Assembly just indicated, we are also marking the twentieth anniversary of the UNESCO Slave Route Project, launched to break the silence surrounding the slave trade and its consequences.
>
> "At United Nations Headquarters, work is under way on a permanent memorial to the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. It will stand as a constant reminder of the courage of the slaves, abolitionists and unsung heroes who helped end the oppression of slavery. It will also promote greater recognition of the contributions that slaves and their descendants have made in their societies.
>
> "I hope the memorial will also be a source of inspiration in the continuing fight against the many forms of slavery that still exist today. Around the world, millions of people are subject to human trafficking, debt bondage, sexual slavery and domestic servitude while the perpetrators of those violations of human rights operate with total impunity.
>
> "On this day, let us remember the abuses of the past and intensify our efforts to end those of the present."

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guinea-Bissau, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Da Gama (Guinea-Bissau): On behalf of the African Group, I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for organizing this annual commemorative event on a matter close to the heart of Africa, the continent most affected by this scourge. Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade mark one of the darkest chapters in human history, spanning over 400 years, claiming a toll of more than 15 million men, women and children — victims of atrocities of such brutality it is indeed an inhumane tragedy.

In commemoration of the memory of the victims, the General Assembly, in its resolution 62/122, of 17 December 2007, declared 25 March the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, to be observed annually. The International Day also aims to raise awareness about the dangers of racism and prejudice today.

This year's theme, "Victory over slavery: Haiti and beyond", is an opportunity for us to look back at history, to pay tribute to the unsung heroes and to recognize that the slave trade left an indelible mark on the human conscience, as well as the unacceptable complicity of nations that were involved in that tragedy under the pretext of trade for over 400 years.

The transatlantic slave trade was the largest forced migration in history, and undeniably one of the most inhumane. The extensive exodus of Africans spread to many areas of the world over a 400-year period and was unprecedented in the annals of recorded human history.

The General Assembly adopted resolution 63/5, on 20 October, 2008, and welcomed the proposal of erecting

> "at a place of prominence at United Nations Headquarters that is easily accessible to delegates, United Nations staff and visitors, a permanent memorial in acknowledgement of the tragedy and in consideration of the legacy of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade" (*resolution 63/5, para. 1*).

The Permanent Memorial initiative was established to oversee the permanent memorial project, with membership drawn from all geographical regions and with Member States from the Caribbean Community and the African Union playing a leading role. Coincidentally, Mr. Rodney Leon, a son of Haiti, was selected as the winner of the international competition to design the memorial. The memorial will stand tall as

a constant reminder of, and in honour of, the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

The "Ark of Return" is the name that the permanent memorial will bear. As a work of art, it will illustrate, in the words of the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. John Ashe, "a voice of change and hope" that indeed "deepens our faith in human goodness and decency, and for this, we are all grateful".

The Ark of Return is ready to be built right here at the United Nations. Several contributions from Member States have made that possible, and we express our collective thanks. I wish to urge all Member States to make just one more effort to reach the finish line — that of joining hands to make the final financial contribution needed for the completion of the memorial, which is a symbol of all our aspirations and dreams and of the memory of those lives lost — acknowledging the tragedy and remembering the legacy, lest we forget.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tonga, who will speak on behalf of the States of the Asia-Pacific Group.

Mr. Tupouniua (Tonga): As Chair of the Asia Pacific Group for the month of March, I have the honour to speak on behalf of its 55 Member States.

At the outset, we express our gratitude to you, Mr. President, for having convened this special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly, on the seventh annual International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We would also like to thank all representatives present today in the General Assembly.

This year's theme, "Victory over slavery: Haiti and beyond", pays tribute to the fight against slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, which were a tragically and grossly inhumane global crime against humanity that should never be forgotten. We also gather here today to honour the lives of the more than 15 million men, women and children from the African continent who suffered as victims of that brutal system over the span of more than 400 years, from the 1500s to the 1900s. Indeed, this is a very dark chapter in our history, clear evidence of man's inhumanity to our fellow men and our capacity for evil in our treatment of others.

However, it is worthy to note unsung heroes such as former British Member of Parliament William Wilberforce and President Lincoln of the United States, who fought for the freedom of slaves. However, notwithstanding the abolishment of legalized slavery, we still face modern forms of slavery, such as debt bondage, forced labour, forced and underage marriages, the recruitment of child soldiers and trafficking in children. The majority of those victims are people who suffer continued poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization and socioeconomic exclusion. We must therefore continue to fight this contemporary scourge and actively pursue freedom from slavery and human dignity for all.

Today, I think we are reminded by the theme that the success of our continued fight will lie first in freeing ourselves from the system that exists today that allows contemporary forms of slavery to persist. As such, beyond remembering the past and moving beyond Haiti, there is a need not only to remember and honour, but to take action as well. In taking action against those modern forms of slavery to eliminate them from existence, we indeed honour and remember those who paid the price through death and experience. The inhumane practice of people exploiting other people is not unlike the master and the slave of the past, and such practices persist to this day through modern forms of slavery.

The system I speak of today that allows for the continued enslavement of victims in modern times is poverty. Poverty creates the circumstances, ripe for exploitation by the modern slave-master, to take advantage of the poor and the desperate, allowing for the contemporary forms of slavery. Addressing the roots and tackling the causes of poverty would eradicate the system created by the modern slave master to perpetuate this blight on our common humanity. I believe this is what the great emancipator and Haitian leader Toussaint Louverture meant when he declared that he was born a slave but nature gave him the soul of a free man.

Louverture was born into a system that enslaved him and his people, but his will, reflected in his actions to be free and to free his people, resulted in the liberation of his country. We too, therefore, are reminded here today that we must follow suit, and move beyond Haiti by using that example and our will to be free — our will to be free from the poverty that enslaves our fellow man and to finally emancipate ourselves from the bondage of this modern-day form of slavery. We must do so for the sake of the victims of the past and the present and, indeed, for ourselves.

We commend the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the African Group for their continuing dedication to this annual Commemorative Day. This day of worldwide activities to remember the victims is an opportune moment to raise awareness and discuss the causes, consequences and lessons learned so that no person or country is ever again subjected to the mass deportation, slavery, racism and prejudice that will be remembered forever as among the worst violations of human rights in history.

We therefore recall the support for the efforts made by CARICOM, the African Group, and the Permanent Memorial Committee, led by the Permanent Representative of Jamaica, to implement resolution 63/5 and erect the permanent memorial to honour the victims of slavery. In noting that the project is targeted for completion at the opening of the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly, with the inclusion of the winning design "Ark of Return", we call on Member States and other interested parties to support this initiative, including additional voluntary contributions to the fund.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bulgaria, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Tafrov (Bulgaria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Every year on this day, the United Nations honours and remembers the millions of people who suffered and died in slavery. But on this day, we also need to make a pledge to intensify our efforts to eliminate the remnants of slavery and to raise awareness about the dangers of racism and prejudice that persist to this very day.

The transatlantic slave trade was one of the darkest chapters in human history and, unfortunately, many people around the world still suffer the consequences of that tragedy, which took the lives of millions of people. Today it is our responsibility to make sure that the world never forgets this brutality and that the facts of slavery are examined, understood and addressed adequately.

On this day we must also remember the brave men and women who struggled out from under slavery and risked their lives for freedom. Their courage and determination should lead us in our own struggle against contemporary forms of slavery.

This year we celebrate the victory over slavery and the establishment, 210 years ago, of the Republic of Haiti, which was the first nation to become independent as a result of a slave revolt.

(*spoke in French*)

I therefore take this opportunity to express my heartfelt congratulations to my Haitain friends.

(*spoke in English*)

The year 2014 also marks the twentieth anniversary of the UNESCO Slave Route Project, launched in Benin, with the aim of breaking the silence on the slave trade and slavery and raising awareness with regard to its consequences. We welcome the progress achieved so far and the contribution of the project to the recognition of the slave trade and slavery as a crime against humanity.

The Eastern European States supported the decision to establish a permanent memorial to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, which would help us keep alive the memory of the millions of people who suffered in that tragedy.

There is no place in our world for slavery in any form, and we must all step up our efforts to work towards its eradication. The prohibition of slavery is a cornerstone of international human rights law. Yet contemporary forms of slavery and slavery-like practices still exist in all regions of the world. It is alarming that the estimated number of persons, including children, subjected to forced labour continues to increase worldwide while, at the same time, very few perpetrators are brought to justice. Robust protections against human rights abuses should be established at national and international levels to combat contemporary forms of slavery.

The Eastern European States share the conviction that in their strategies aimed at the eradication of slavery countries need to focus more on measures for prevention, protection and victim support, as well as the prosecution of the perpetrators. Contemporary forms of slavery warrant serious and heightened attention from the international community.

We should all join efforts to eradicate trafficking in human beings. It is a matter of deep concern that women, men, boys and girls in vulnerable positions are traded for the purpose of sexual or labour exploitation, the removal of organs, begging, domestic servitude, forced marriage, illegal adoption, et cetera.

Enhanced measures against trafficking in human beings need to be implemented both at national and

international levels, including special mechanisms to better identify, refer, protect and assist trafficked victims, as well as to prosecute cross-border trafficking cases. We also recognize the important role in that regard played by civil society organizations and service providers working on victim protection and assistance.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight the fact that, unfortunately, slavery is not yet a thing of the past. It is appalling that even today human beings are being sold and trafficked into forced labour or prostitution. The international community still has a long way to go to eradicate trafficking in human beings and to put an end to contemporary forms of slavery.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Chile, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Gálvez (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States on the 2014 International Day of Remembrance of Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade under the theme "Victory over slavery: Haiti and beyond".

On 25 March every year, the General Assembly pays honour the victims of the inhumane system of the transatlantic slave trade, which uprooted countless millions of men, women and children from their homes and shipped them and sold them as cargo to various regions, including the Americas, where they received inhumane, unfair and despicable treatment and were subjected to torture, abuse and forced labour.

While slavery and the transatlantic slave trade were among the gravest crimes against humanity, we must recognize that they have not been acknowledged adequately and that too little is known about this inhumane system, the lasting consequences of which continue to be felt in many parts of our societies to this very day.

From that situation surged the liberation of the many African men, women and children who had endured the torment, torture and attempted dehumanization, and who fought against immense odds to gain their freedom. In that regard, as the theme chosen for this session appropriately underscores — "Victory over slavery: Haiti and beyond" — the independence proclaimed by Haiti in 1804 was a milestone in our history as the first slave revolt that managed to lead to the foundation of a State. That set in motion the movement for freedom from bondage in other parts of the Caribbean and the broader Latin American region, as well as in North America, Europe and beyond. Undeniably, that revolt set a precedent and triggered other examples where the resistance of the human spirit to unacceptable domination strengthened the global cause of freedom and dignity, as well as the resole of humankind to fight tirelessly against the scourge of slavery, racism and racial discrimination.

Nonetheless, the struggle for full and absolute emancipation is a fight that continues, awaiting the necessary reparation to fully heal humankind from the brutality of the period when slavery was forced and perpetuated upon a particular segment of humankind. In that regard, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States strongly supported the proclamation by the General Assembly, on 13 December 2013, of the International Decade for People of African Descent, beginning on 1 January 2015, under the apt theme of "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development". In the same spirit, the Foreign Ministers of our region proclaimed the International Decade for Latin American and Caribbean People of African Descent, which began on 1 January 2014.

The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States takes note of the August 2013 report of the Secretary-General outlining the implementation of the outreach programme and steps to enhance global awareness on the activities associated with the commemoration (A/68/291).

We wish to express our recognition and admiration for the important work of UNESCO through its successful Slave Route Project on the theme "Resistance, freedom, heritage" and, more recently, with the production of the educational film entitled *A Story Not To Be Forgotten*.

The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States firmly stresses the importance of culture at the heart of the identity of each of our countries and as a catalyst of cultural integration in our region, which is characterized by the diversity of cultural expressions of our Latin American and Caribbean identities. In that regard, our region attaches great importance to educating and informing current and future generations about the causes, consequences and lessons of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade so as to ensure that this dark period of human history is never repeated.

We are especially appreciative of the events organized around this commemoration. At the national

level, a number of initiatives have been undertaken by States of our Group with a view to disseminating information on the slave trade and its gruesome historical legacy.

The Group commends the leading role played by Jamaica and other Member States of the region and of the Caribbean Community, in close collaboration with the Member States of the African Group, regarding the development of the permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. We encourage States that have not yet done so to make a contribution to the fund established for the permanent memorial. In that connection, the Members States of Latin America and the Caribbean reiterate their firm support for the permanent memorial and hope that it will be completed and erected at a place of prominence at the United Nations Headquarters in time for the opening of the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly.

In conclusion, the Member States of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States join with the entire international community in commemorating this important day that celebrates the struggle and subsequent achievements of the people who were emancipated from the scourge of physical slavery. It is indeed a day of celebration, but it is also a day for us to take stock and to deepen our resolve to tackle the contemporary challenges of inequality, poverty, colonialism and more — all of which have their antecedents in the mindset that believed that one race was superior and another was inferior. That concept must be thoroughly discredited and abandoned even in its most contemporary forms. Freedom won must be constantly protected. Please count on States Members of the Group of Latin America and Caribbean Countries in that noble pursuit.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand, who will speak on behalf of the Western European and other States Group.

Mr. McLay (New Zealand): I would first of all like to note how appropriate it is the General Assembly is being presided over today by a representative of a region that was so horribly affected by the trade we are debating.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States in commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

It is now more than 200 years since the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, which represented one of the longest, most brutal and most sustained assaults on human rights and human dignity in recorded history. The full toll of that cruel trade may never be known, but between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries it is likely that it claimed more than 12 million victims. As many as 18 per cent of those who were forced to embark on the now-infamous Middle Passage are believed to have perished before reaching their destination, while the suffering and indignity experienced by those who did survive remains one of the darkest stains on humankind's collective conscience.

Today we gather to pay our solemn respect to the countless victims of that barbaric and inhumane trade, to remember its aftermath in the form of generations of enforced labour with all its attendant cruelties and to acknowledge the suffering and injustice they endured, as well as the suffering, injustice and anguish of those in their homelands from whom they had been so arbitrarily and cruelly taken.

Unfortunately, slavery is not just a scourge of the past, nor simply an injustice of the past only to be acknowledged as such. Even today, millions of our fellow human beings are subjected to practices that are very clearly modern forms of slavery, including human trafficking, forced prostitution, debt bondage, the forcible involvement of children in armed conflict and forced marriages. All those are examples of contemporary practices that hark back to the grave injustices of past times, practices made all the more stark by today's transportation and communication technologies. Often the victims are the most vulnerable, taken from what are often our most vulnerable communities.

One of the best ways that we can pay tribute to the victims of the transatlantic slave trade is for us to redouble our efforts to end all contemporary forms of slavery. Today's commemorations also serve as a powerful reminder that much remains to be done to combat other affronts to human rights and human dignity, including racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

As we honour today the victims of one of history's greatest crimes — one of its most heart-wrenching tragedies — let us also summon the will to stand determined and united in championing the fundamental rights and the basic dignities they were so cruelly

denied and which today are still denied to many, and let us do so in the name and on behalf of all members of our global family.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Ms. Cousens (United States of America): Today we pay tribute to the men, women and children robbed of their freedom and their lives by slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. We honour the memory of the millions who died, who were stolen from their families, who suffered from disease and deprivation and who experienced other untold horrors because of slavery and its barbaric toll. The transatlantic slave trade is a stain on our collective conscience that indelibly marked our own history and left wounds we must still strive to heal.

Today we also commemorate those who fought in countries around the world against that outrageous practice. We particularly honour those who defied the chains of captivity, intimidation, violence and fear to rise up against injustice and reclaim their humanity and their rightful freedom. It was enslaved men and women who rose up 210 years ago to claim their independence in what became the Republic of Haiti who showed the world that slavery, oppression and indignity could be overcome.

We look forward to the completion of the permanent memorial in honour of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade designed by a Haitian-American, Rodney Leon, as a powerful reminder of their strength and common purpose. We must always remember their courage and the possibility for justice to triumph over even the darkest crimes. As we combat modern day forms of slavery today, we must be inspired by their example and be unrelenting in our resolve to see all individuals free to live in peace and dignity, free from captivity, free from exploitation and abuse, and free from racism, discrimination and prejudice.

The transatlantic slave trade is one of the darkest chapters in human history. It marks us in ways that we must always strive to overcome and that we must never allow ourselves to forget. Today we recommit to combating slavery's enduring consequences. We renew our collective determination to end slavery in all its forms and we rededicate ourselves to advancing rights, freedom and dignity for all.

The President: Before proceeding further, I should like to consult members with a view to inviting the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Special Envoy for Haiti and member of the International Scientific Committee of the UNESCO Slave Route Project (2014-2015), Ms. Michaëlle Jean, to make a statement on this occasion.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Ms. Jean, to make a statement at this commemorative meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Jean.

Ms. Jean (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) (*spoke in French*): I thank the President, the Chef de Cabinet and the Chairs of the regional groups for their statements, which have deeply touched me.

It is, of course, with great feeling that I address the Assembly on the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade and of 400 years of vile treatment, which ruined millions of lives. We are living in a world where shadows and light live together, where lives are continuously threatened, where liberties are constantly scorned. And this Hall in which we have gathered is the bright demonstration of a determination to bring the best part of ourselves together against all the dark forces of destruction.

We, the peoples of the United Nations, are determined to save future generations from the scourges that have been inflicted upon humankind and have caused unimaginable suffering to people, determined to express our faith in basic rights, our faith in the dignity and value of the human being, our faith in the equality between the rights of men and women, and also the equality between nations large and small. We are determined to also establish the necessary conditions for maintaining justice, determined to ensure social progress and establish better living conditions in greater freedom. We, the peoples of the United Nations, have decided to come together to create a better world and to be ever mindful in the face of that which would undermine and jeopardize it.

In meeting here today, we seek to remember together one of the darkest experiences in the history

of humankind. We are in this Hall because we believe in the duty to remember. We know how important it is to draw lessons from the past in order to strengthen the present and build the future. Knowing where we come from, assessing the path that has been covered and recognizing the crimes that have been committed and hardships overcome by those who came before us makes us stronger and more enlightened. A people without memory has no future, said the poet and politician Aimé Césaire. And we know that the duty to remember is a difficult but necessary task.

The experience that I will talk about in this Hall is my own, but it concerns humankind as a whole. I was born as part of the dark past that we are commemorating today. I was born of the men, women and children who, by the thousands, were cruelly split apart and robbed of everything — their names, their languages, their cultures, their homes, their relationships, their dignity and their humanity. I am the daughter of those 15 to 25 or 30 million human beings who were captured and then deported to be sold like beasts of burden. I come from those totally destroyed lives, reduced to nothing by various scurrilous trade routes, which were perfectly developed and accepted over centuries — the transatlantic slave trade established between Europe, Africa and America.

The figures are awful, but they hide even more alarming casualties, because for every survivor it is estimated that five others died — victims of invasions and attacks carried out to capture slaves; victims who died in multitudes during forced deportations or cruelty suffered before deportation. Thousands died of disease and abuse in the crossing of the Atlantic. The Atlantic Ocean is a shrine, an immense grave. The crimes were unspeakable and the victims innumerable. I was born of one of the plantations, which through total enslavement, the forced labour of thousands of my ancestors, ensured the prosperity of the European colonial Powers that seized the American continents, where the indigenous populations were exterminated.

I was born of Saint-Domingue — the old jewel of the French colony — whence came a strong call from such brave black fighters as Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Alexandre Pétion, who were boldly followed by tens of thousands of armed slaves who rebelled and demonstrated great courage. I am born of that struggle which we must now celebrate. It was a struggle of men and women who were determined to put an end to that immoral trade, to that shameful exploitation, which condemned them to non-existence, and who found in the sublime words and values of freedom, equality and fraternity the great possibility to be reborn.

Those words and values, which came from the Enlightenment movement, were able to enlighten humankind and brought a new dawn to the darkest corners of the plantations from which I came. I am born of those women and men who found in the brilliance of those ideas the meaning of their own dreams for freedom, their deep aspiration to equality and their immense need for fraternity. We would not be together today, and the woman that I am would not be standing free before the Assembly were it not for the ideas of the Enlightenment thinkers, which were, in essence, as the philosopher Tzvetan Todorov said, taken with history and eternity, freedom and equality.

The Enlightenment gave rise to three fundamental, unvarnished ideas with innumerable consequences. First was the idea of autonomy, and consequently emancipation, which required the freedom to examine, question, criticize, doubt, choose and decide for oneself. Then there was the idea of the purpose of humankind, which gave rise to the assertion that all human beings, through their very nature as humans, possess inalienable rights. And finally there was the idea of universality, from which comes the demand for equality and which makes it possible for more struggles to be undertaken today — those of women, of course, and efforts to combat all forms of alienation from freedom. From the Enlightenment came the following three words: liberty, equality, fraternity, with all the promises they entail and which were spread to light the flame of all the dreams of a newfound humanity. Those three words not only inspired the French Revolution, but changed an entire world.

And I know what the dream of emancipation inspired among my ancestors — liberty, equality and fraternity — and for us, the blacks, who were not invited to the revolutionary banquet and could not partake of that bread. But it is not important that those words were pronounced in the oppressor's language. My ancestors recognized them in their own flesh and took ownership of them as one takes ownership of the spoils — something that is owed, a treasure that should be shared, a beautiful treasure that is there for the taking. Nothing is more beautiful. Liberty, equality, fraternity — three words that are the motto for a struggle that, while it may try us to the marrow, is

yet nothing like the bite of the whip, of humiliation, of rape, of dispossession, of racism. It was on those ideas that my ancestors would push back the immovable and overcome the impossible. Thus in 1804 was born the first republic of black men and women liberated by themselves and able to return to the land soiled by their degradation and sorrowing captivity its original name, Haiti — Haiti, which means a mountainous land in the language of the first Caribbean people — Arawak, Taino, Caribe, all decimated. And the dream realized in Haiti very quickly encouraged others. From Haiti came the spark that lit the great cauldron of the fight to abolish slavery, particularly in the Americas.

Liberty, equality, fraternity — not just for us, Haitian men and women, but for all those in chains, said the President of the young Haitian Republic, Alexandre Pétion, to Simón Bolívar, known as El Libertador, driven from Venezuela and Jamaica in 1815 and given asylum by Pétion. He also gave him wings, because Pétion agreed to supply Bolívar with the financial and logistical means to take up his campaign for liberation once more, but only on condition, he insisted, that his fight would guarantee the emancipation of the slaves in all the liberated lands — a challenge to Bolívar, who was himself descended from great slaveowning families.

And thus were born the new republics of Latin America, as a whole and individually, of the victorious vision and resources of the little republic, which paid dearly for it. The great Powers of Europe, with the complicity of the enslaving and segregationist United States of that era, were not slow to respond. Isolated by an embargo, its economy reduced to nothing, deprived of access to every market, the young nation of Haiti was branded and trapped. But standing tall in the face of history, Haitians opened and forced the way forward. Four years later, in 1807, the British Parliament enacted a bill outlawing the slave trade. The liberation of the Latino countries emerged from the abolition of slavery, achieved 30 years later. Fifty-six years later, in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the abolition of slavery in the slaveowning secessionist states of the South.

Down the decades, women also took up the cause proclaiming and winning their right to vote. Then came the great twentieth-century decolonization movement in Africa, followed by the civil rights movement of black Americans in the United States. On 25 March 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr., with thousands of demonstrators, entered Montgomery after days on the march and greeted the Governor of Alabama, saying that they had not arrived merely after five days and 80 kilometres marching but after three centuries of suffering and poverty; they had arrived before the Governor of Alabama to declare to him that they now demanded their freedom, the right to vote, equal protection under the law and an end to police violence. Then, more recently, came the end of apartheid in South Africa and the election of Nelson Mandela, Madiba.

(*spoke in English*)

So this year marks the 210th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Haiti. And it is still standing, teetering from one ordeal to the next, sometimes betrayed by its own people, from human disaster to natural disaster, including the earthquake of 2010, which left the country deeply wounded and in ruins, mourning the death of 300,000 of its dearest sons and daughters. Haiti bends but does not break. The country seeks to be reborn, to exit poverty, to break free from the aid dependency that undermines its sovereignty, for which it paid such a high price. Haitian women and men want all of humankind to remember.

When Barack Obama was elected President of the United States in November 2008 his first visit to a foreign country, as is customary, was to Canada, in February 2009. History intended for the first black President and Commander-in-Chief of the United States to be greeted by me, the first black Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada. The power of that symbol was not lost on anyone. It was the first thing we shared when we met, enjoying the moment. The Assembly should also know that after we discussed issues of interest to both our countries, Canada and the United States, President Obama asked me about Haiti.

I had just come home from an official visit there to assess the damage from a violent hurricane in the northern parts of the country. While I was in Haiti, as I addressed a crowd of mostly young people gathered at the foot of a statue of Toussaint Louverture, the great hero of Haiti's independence, all of a sudden a young woman stepped forward and shouted. Remember, she said, you owe it to them. You owe it to our heroes. If it were not for what they did, today you would not be the Governor General of Canada. If it were not for their courage, their struggles, their victory, Barack Obama would not be President of the United States, either. Tell him that everything got started here, in Haiti. We are poor, but we are proud, and we are strong, she said.

That girl, was she not right, I asked President Obama. It is true, she is so right, he kept repeating. It is true. She is so right. He was obviously quite moved, nodding his head in approval. Haitian women and men want all of humankind to remember. And that is what we have chosen to do, as we gather here on this day, we the people of the United Nations, who have chosen to sit at the same table, under the same roof, under a covenant of solidarity, with an ethic of sharing that we must always strengthen and tirelessly cultivate so that it may bring its rich and vital fruits to humankind — progress, peace and stability, knowledge and education for all, sustainable development, human rights, responsibility, liberty and prosperity — the only true and lasting stalwarts against turmoil and the forces of destruction, the forces of darkness that still lurk, seeking to retake their ground.

(*spoke in French*)

We have come a long way, and the road is still long, very long, studded with pitfalls that we create ourselves, that we seek to undo and that make us test ourselves. It is up to us, the peoples of the United Nations, to ensure that this world, which we wish to be rich through the melding of our cultures, experience, civilizations and interlinking destinies, is shaped on enduring brotherhood on the basis of dignity. As everyone has said today, we must move from words to action in the greatest confidence and with all the necessary perseverance.

The slave boats of yesterday remind us of today's boat people and the tragedy of millions of people trying to escape poverty crammed into makeshift boats in the hope of a better life, with the news constantly reporting the sinking of those boats and the tragic toll of bodies washed ashore. The number of people throughout the world who are subjected to forced labour or who suffer the inhumane human trafficking that escapes the international community's attention is also of great concern. This International Day reminds the entire world that today, like yesterday, the struggle for freedom, equality and brotherhood and for the respect of the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains crucial and is more urgent than ever.

I, too, would in passing like to pay tribute to the upcoming inauguration, at United Nations Headquarters, of the work of art of an architect of Haitian descent, Mr. Rodney Leon, entitled "The Ark of Return". It will be erected in remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. That work of art will mark the twentieth anniversary of the Slave Route Project, launched by UNESCO in Ouidah, Benin, in 1994.

Ms. Muna (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): I would like to start by thanking President John Ashe, who, through the convening of this meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, provides the international community with the opportunity to talk about the impact of that tragedy. I thank the President for this moment of sharing. I would also like to convey the gratitude of Cameroon and of its Head of State, His Excellency Paul Biya, President of the Republic, to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his admirable leadership.

This year, we have placed Haiti at the heart of our long-standing celebration of 25 March under the theme "Victory over slavery: Haiti and beyond". Once again, Cameroon is honoured to take part in this commemoration, and I would like to thank the great family of the United Nations for giving us the opportunity to take the floor on this occasion.

Like other countries of the Caribbean, Haiti illustrates the historic tragedy of the black people, as well as their tremendous resilience in the face of adversity. Torn from their continent, transported in inhuman conditions, subjugated for centuries, the sons and daughters of Africa who passed under the yoke of the transatlantic slave trade ultimately said no to servitude and to alienation. That is how, in time, the Haitian people assumed their historic and political destiny and faced up to nature's elements when parts of Kiskeya, the former name of Hispaniola, were struck by devastating catastrophes, such as the earthquake of 10 January 2010.

Once again, as it has throughout its history, Haiti showed remarkable determination and the resolute will to survive with heroic resilience. In the spirit of solidarity and humanitarian compassion, at the time Cameroon spontaneously and promptly provided significant financial support at the decision of the President of the Republic, Mr. Paul Biya. I would like to mention that Cameroon has for many years participated in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti in order to restore and build peace.

(*spoke in English*)

Cameroon has always contributed to the commemoration of the slave trade because our country

suffered greatly throughout that darkest chapter of our human history. On the occasion of this year's celebration, it is important to underline a historical element of the transatlantic slave trade that is not well known — the slave port of Bimbia, which is located 12 kilometres from the seaside town of Limbe in the south-west region of Cameroon. Earlier research on the transatlantic slave trade in West Africa focused more on El Mina, in Ghana, Gorée, in Senegal and Ouidah, in Benin.

As a matter of fact, Bimbia, on the Cameroon coast, played a major role in the history and industry of the transatlantic slave trade. Bimbia was known to Portuguese explorers as early as 1472. It became an important collecting point for slaves and other cargo during the second half of the eighteenth century. The first slave ship left Bimbia in 1777 for the island of Saint Vincent. For decades, thousands of enslaved men, women and children passed through Bimbia before being forced to turn their backs on the Bight of Biafra. Those who survived headed towards the Americas. Bimbia became so important in the Gulf of Guinea that its influence extended westward to and beyond Ambas Bay.

Today, Bimbia is classified as a national cultural site and has therefore become a very important site that benefits from our Government's full attention. As a consequence, our Government has embarked on gradually rehabilitating and restoring all its relics, while, at the same time, carrying out research in order to improve and add to the scientific and historical documentation on the Bimbia slave trade port.

Bearing all the above in mind, our country is ready to collaborate with the international community and any institution or well-wisher who would like to join or support us in the process of reconstituting our history and our collective memory. The intensification of specialized research on Bimbia is necessary and even indispensable to our country if we are to envisage inscription on the World Heritage List, according to UNESCO requirements.

(*spoke in French*)

In conclusion, allow me to reaffirm the resilience of the Haitian people in the face of adversity. Haiti's history reminds us of the need to respect human dignity. The international community must continue its fight and advocacy to renew and protect that dignity and thereby forever vanquish slavery in all its forms.

Mr. Régis (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): Seven years ago, the General Assembly designated 25 March 2007 as the International Day for the Commemoration of the Two-hundredth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The international community thus chose to honour the memory of the millions of men, women and children who were torn from Africa's shores to be cast into the hell of the American colonies. It also sought to pay tribute to all those who, throughout history, opposed the slave trade and slavery — philosophers, scholars, writers, politicians, abolitionists, men of the cloth and individual citizens who denounced the ideology of terror and domination that arose from corrupt rhetorical arguments. They were fighters and martyrs who risked everything, including their lives, to denounce the enormous, dehumanizing enterprise that was the slave trade.

This year, the United Nations decided to closely associate the Republic of Haiti with this commemoration by choosing as its theme "Victory over slavery: Haiti and beyond". We are grateful for that honour. I would like, on behalf of the Government and people of Haiti, to convey my gratitude to the United Nations and the organizers of today's meeting for their distinguished esteem and recognition of a country whose proud achievements include having aimed the first mighty blow against slavery that would one day prove fatal to the enterprise. It took place in 1804 — 210 years ago today.

The tribute to Haiti is due first and foremost to the first resistance fighters, the freedom Maroons who have expressed their rejection of the slave system since the sixteenth century. It extends to those who picked up the torch in 1791; to the pioneer of independence, Toussaint Louverture; to the founding fathers of our country of Haiti, namely, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Henri Christophe and Alexandre Pétion; and the anonymous heroes of an epic war of liberation that, for the very first time in history, culminated in the triumph of a slave army of superb, bare-footed fighters from the ranks of the slave trade over their oppressors.

In the eyes of the Republic of Haiti, the United Nations tribute embodies an undeniably symbolic dimension. Indeed, Haiti's independence at the dawn of the nineteenth century represented a challenge aimed at the international order of the time, which was based on the slave trade and fed two types of slavery — economic and psychological — of the black man who was destined for forced labour, reduced to the rank of merchandise,

and subject to all forms of racial prejudice, disdain, indignity, injustice and oppression.

But Haiti was more than a mere challenge or anomaly in the eyes of the colonial Powers; it opened a deep breach in the system of dominant values of the time, condemning slavery and informing the world that the system based on slavery was null and void and no longer acceptable. Haiti's independence in 1804 therefore launched a powerful initial momentum. Among others, Great Britain and America abolished the transatlantic slave trade in 1807; France put an end to slavery in 1848, followed by the United States in 1865.

By questioning the very foundations of an international order that justified man's subjugation by man, based on the pigmentation and shade of his skin and turning into reality the principles of the first declaration of human and citizens rights in 1789, the Haitian revolution undeniably contributed to forging the universal concepts of humanity, according to the eloquent words of Mr. Amadou Mahtar M'Bow.

In that light, the Haitian revolution of 1804, more humane and greater than that of 1776, according to Mr. Abel Nicolas Léger, was an important watershed in history. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it served as inspiration, point of reference and model to a great many national movements fighting for emancipation and independence in Latin America, the Caribbean and the African continent. It ultimately proved essential to the advent of a new moral order based on recognition of and respect for human dignity and the fundamental principles of the social contract — genuine freedom, equality and fraternity among men and women of all races without distinction.

Haiti's contribution to a universal concept of human rights is engraved in the tomes of history. Eminent historians do not hesitate to refer to the Haitian revolution as the third revolution, in line with the American revolution of 1776 and the French revolution of 1789 — the three major events of that bloody era that saw the old order toppled by an emerging new world. Indeed, Haiti's unique character deserves to be better known and recognized.

The United Nations has honoured Haiti on the occasion of the 210th anniversary of its independence, by this magnificent tribute, for which the people and Government of Haiti are especially grateful. The story of the end of the slave trade deserves to be told here at the United Nations, as so aptly recalled by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 1 March 2007.

I also pay tribute to the brotherly countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which have played an active and decisive role in the commemoration of this Day. Like Haiti, they have known the bonds of servitude and shared a fate that has made them more aware of and sensitive to every other struggle for rights, equity, justice and respect for the eminent dignity of human beings.

I express our appreciation for "The Ark of Return", the permanent memorial to the victims of slavery that will be erected to mark the tragedy of the transatlantic slave trade, as announced here at the United Nations on 23 September 2013. Thanks to the talented Rodney Leon, an architect of Haitian descent, this magnificent structure won an international contest in which 83 countries participated and 310 entries were considered. I thank UNESCO, the Department of Public Information, the CARICOM countries, the Chair of the Permanent Memorial Committee and the countries of the African Union, who directed, encouraged and supervised this project. Architect Rodney Leon deserves our warmest congratulations and our deep gratitude.

Much more than a simple exercise in remembrance, the International Day reminds us that the protection of human rights, which is at the very heart of the mission of the United Nations, is a continuously recurring, never-ending fight and that the struggle against slavery in its newer forms requires vigilant, sustained and determined work by the international community.

Many challenges still lie before us. Today, millions of people around the world are unfortunately still subjected to forced labour. Hundreds of thousands of others around the world are compelled to live in extreme poverty and vulnerability. The forced recruitment of child soldiers and human trafficking are just some of the forms of this ever-present abject exploitation, which is universally rejected by people of conscience. The consequences of slavery are at the core of glaring social and economic inequalities, intolerance and racism, which are sometimes institutional in nature and from which people or groups of people of African descent still suffer in various regions of the world.

This commemorative Day must therefore be one of joint reflection concerning the ground that has been covered since 1807, of awareness of the current

dangers posed by racism and of the need for enhanced cooperation by the international community to achieve a final victory over all the modern manifestations of servitude and man's exploitation of his fellow man.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Spain joins in the commemoration of this International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Every 25 March, we come together here to recall one of the most dreadful and horrifying chapters in the history of humankind. I would say that it is also one of the most shameful chapters. The representative of Haiti stated with great feeling that this was a point in time when history became dehumanized. History lost its direction.

Many figures have been posited. One estimate is that between 14 and 15 million individuals lost their lives over the four centuries of slavery. We must therefore pay homage today to all those who perished in absolutely tragic and unjustifiable circumstances. It is also a moment when we must pay tribute to all those slaves and abolitionists who, thanks to their determination and courage, contributed to closing one of the most painful chapters in the history of humankind and were the veritable architects of the new American societies of which we are so proud.

Unfortunately, as many speakers have stated before me, slavery continues on in new, modern forms such as human trafficking and trafficking in children — forms that are just as cruel or even more cruel than the old ones. Spain has always been among those States that seek to combat slavery and all modern forms of slavery. I am therefore very proud to announce today an additional contribution of €30,000 Euros by Spain to the permanent memorial for the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, which was designed by the famous Haitian artist, Rodney Leon. That contribution will help ensure that we all remember, every day and forever, that those sad chapters in history must not be repeated in the future.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): It is my great honour to make a statement on behalf of the Government of Japan at today's meeting in commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Every year, 25 March provides us with an opportunity to remember the victims of slavery and remind ourselves that we must never forget the horrific history of that scourge. Since 2008, Japan has been one of the sponsors of the annual General Assembly resolution entitled "Permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade". We appreciate the initiative taken by the States members of Caribbean Community and the African States to submit that important resolution.

In November 2013, Japan once again became a sponsor of that resolution. General Assembly resolution 68/7 endorses the initiative of Member States to erect a permanent memorial and requests the Secretary-General to organize a series of activities annually to commemorate the International Day.

The Universal Declaration of Human Right states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Japan will continue its efforts to end every form of slavery and to realize freedom and equality for all.

Mrs. Moreno Guerra (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation fully aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Chile on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries on this important agenda item.

As Cubans, we are proud of our African roots. The identity of the Cuban nation developed through an cross-cultural process among various ethnic groups living in very difficult circumstances, first under colonialism and then neocolonialism. In 1959, we began a new stage of genuine integration that cherishes all components of the Cuban identity. We are a mixture of Spanish and African, for the most part, with contributions from Asia and indigenous peoples of the Americas. In Cuba as in other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, we see the consequences of the transatlantic slave trade. They arrived at the colonial plantations on the island as a result of that cruel trade of more than 1.3 million Africans. These men, women and children of Africa were forced from their villages and families and sold as slave labourers on the other side of the Atlantic.

Over the centuries, the Cuban culture and national character also emerged from African crucible. Cubans are grateful to our African ancestors for their wisdom, their creativity, their adaptability to adverse circumstances, the richness of their histories and religious beliefs, the rhythms of their music, their energy and temperament and, more basically, their spirit of rebellion against injustice and their undaunted courage in the fight for independence and liberty. The freed slaves and their descendants were principal

players in the various stages of the war that allowed the Cuban people to exercise their self-determination.

As was expressed by the Commander in Chief of the Cuban revolution, Mr. Fidel Castro, at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban in 2001, the inhumane exploitation of humankind and peoples from three continents, including Asia, affected the destiny and current life of more than 450 million people in the developing world. The poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, disease, child mortality and short life expectancy they suffer, and other calamities impossible to enumerate here, amaze and horrify us. They are the contemporary victims of a barbarity that has endured centuries and are owed reparations for the horrendous crimes committed against against their ancestor and peoples.

The developed world is responsible for the accelerated and almost unstoppable destruction of the environment. It has reaped the greatest benefits of conquest and colonialism, slavery and the transatlantic trade, and rapacious exploitation of hundreds of millions of children in the nations of the South. Cuba firmly supports the just request of a sincere apology and compensation demanded by the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) as reparations for the genocide of indigenous peoples and the slavery of Africans. Cuba also endorses the special and differentiated treatment called for by developing countries, particularly in Africa, in their economic international relations.

Cuba supports and co-sponsors the draft resolution introduced every year on this agenda item by the CARICOM countries and the African Group. We recognize the importance of strengthening United Nations activities and other international organizations, such as UNESCO, on this issue. The minimum that the international community can do is to make reparations for the genocide of indigenous populations and the crimes against humanity committed through the transatlantic slave trade of Africans. Cuba rejects the egoism of wealth and the impunity enjoyed by those who committed the crimes against humanity associated with the historic development of capitalism. They are the same people who today represent the main beneficiaries of globalization founded on the neoliberal model of plunder, the lethal arms of neocolonialist financing, and new threats and the use of force against peoples' free exercise of self-determination.

The President: The General Assembly has thus concluded the commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to conclude its consideration of agenda item 120?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.